



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

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CONTACT: Patrick Gasper, Communications Officer, (608) 266-3559

Public libraries contribute significantly to Wisconsin's economy

Return on investment is more than \$4 per taxpayer dollar

MADISON—Wisconsin public libraries contribute more than \$4 for every dollar taxpayers invest, according to an economic impact research report produced by NorthStar Economics Inc. of Madison.

The research showed the total economic contribution of Wisconsin public libraries is more than \$750 million every year. The return on investment in library services is \$4.06 for each dollar of taxpayer investment. Wisconsin public libraries serve a total state population of 5.6 million and use of public libraries by citizens of the state is growing. In the past 10 years, library visits have grown by 28 percent. Other key measures, such as circulation of library materials, attendance at children's programs, computer access, and electronic access to library catalogs, also have shown healthy growth.

"This study clearly tells us that public libraries are a valuable tax-supported institution," said State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster. "Quantifying the economic impact of libraries on the local, regional, and state economy adds another important piece of information regarding the value of public libraries. Our public libraries nurture young readers, support K-12 students, and provide access to information and technology necessary for lifelong learning. Public libraries are centers of their communities and daily make invaluable contributions to local and regional economic development."

The Department of Public Instruction contracted with NorthStar to conduct a study to determine the economic impact of public libraries and library systems in Wisconsin and the taxpayer return on investment. Results, reported May 1 at the Wisconsin Association of Public Libraries Annual Conference in Stevens Point, showed that public libraries:

- create more than 3,200 jobs directly and more than 3,000 indirectly through economic activity.

(more)

- provide \$427.9 million in total economic value through services provided to Wisconsin residents. This includes the value of books, audio recordings, and videos borrowed by library customers, as well as reference services, children's and adult programs, computer use, and Internet access provided to the public. Libraries provide a host of other services such as community meeting spaces, online books and articles, and specialized databases as well, but comprehensive statistics were not available to quantify and include in the calculated value.
- make a direct economic contribution to Wisconsin's economy of more than \$326 million through activities that include spending for library operations, payroll spending by library employees, and local spending by library visitors. These results were adjusted to account for books, subscriptions, and other out-of-state purchases.

The research further indicates that Wisconsin public library users place a high value on the resources and services available and that as library users age, they value the library services not only for themselves but also for their children and grandchildren. Additionally, libraries are considered a very good value by library users and non-users alike.

"As we work to sustain public libraries in an increasingly competitive economy, we have proof of the solid economic contribution our libraries make and the value the people of Wisconsin place on library services," Burmaster said. "Our libraries truly make a difference in our quality of life."

The DPI contract with NorthStar was funded through a grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services. NorthStar conducted the study between October 2007 and April 2008. The research consisted of analysis of quantitative data, including library spending; library services; lending activities; and facility, equipment and technology use at Wisconsin's 388 public libraries and 17 public library systems. The research team, led by David Ward, president of NorthStar Economics, also collected information through an on-line survey on library use and perceived value from over 2,400 respondents and in 29 focus groups held throughout the state.

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NOTE: The report "The Economic Contribution of Wisconsin Public Libraries to the Economy of Wisconsin" is available on the Department of Public Instruction's Economic Impact of Public Libraries webpage <http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/econimpact.html>. This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpi2008_79.pdf.